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SALT REQUIREMENTS OF RABBITS

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In a study of the food of domestic rabbits at the United States Rabbit Experiment Station, Fontana, Calif., an experiment was conducted during 12 months to determine the quantity of salt necessary to maintain health. The animals used were 10 mature New Zealand herd bucks and 43 New Zealand does with their litters (until weaned at 8 weeks of age). The herd bucks and dry does were given daily one-sixth of a pound of a concentrate consisting of equal parts by weight of whole oats, barley, grain, sorghum, wheat, and a pelleted plant-protein meal. The does with their litters were full fed the same mixture, except that two parts of the protein supplement meal were used in it. The bucks and dry does were given one-fourth of a pound of alfalfa hay daily, but the does with their litters had hay before them at all times. Small quantities of green feed were fed once a day to all the rabbits, and water was continuously available.

Small blocks of white salt were placed in the hutches so that all the animals would have access to them at all times. The blocks were removed once a month and weighed to determine the quantity consumed. The 10 mature bucks consumed on the average 0.088 pound of salt each during the year; their yearly salt consumption was 0.88 percent of their live weight. The 43 does and their litters each consumed on the average 0.195 pound of salt during the 12 months.

The records showed a marked difference in the individual requirements for salt and a variation in the salt consumption of individuals from time to time. This would suggest that there may be a distinct advantage in self-feeding salt, or in always keeping a block of salt in the hutch, so that each animal might have opportunity to satisfy its needs from day to day. The rabbits will not eat too much salt unless they have previously received an insufficient supply. If such is the case, it would be advisable to let them have access to the block of salt for only a short time each day until any unusual craving is satisfied; then it will be safe to keep salt before them continuously.

In large rabbitries, it would be troublesome to keep blocks of salt available at all times in all the hutches; it is much more convenient to incorporate salt in the ration. In mash feeds or pelleted rations it is easy to incorporate the necessary quantity of salt. In whole grain rations it is advisable to put the plant-protein meal into pellet form and add the necessary quantity of salt previous to pelleting. On the basis of the data collected from the experiment, one-sixth of a pound of salt added to each 100 pounds of concentrates will supply the salt requirements of the rabbits.